

15 July 1969

Joshua Lederberg
c/o Washington Post

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

Your recent column on possible contamination from moon-rock samples, which appeared in the Post July 12th, contained a reference to "secondary meteorites" which have "splashed from moon to earth many times..."

Is this a known fact or just a hypothesis about certain meteorites?

I am unable to imagine just how a meteorite's source can be known, and I am unaware of any observed meteoritic collisions with the moon which could produce such "splashes." Of course, I am a layman and not a selenologist, or even an astronomer; all I know is what I pick up from casual reading about such matters.

It seems to me that your ~~note~~ off-hand mention of moon material we already have from "secondary meteorites" tends to negate your lead sentence, that getting samples of the moon's surface is Apollo 11's "most important scientific task."

The whole business of quarantining the astronauts and the command capsule because of possible contamination from the moon strikes me as hogwash. Keep the 50 pounds of rocks in a sterile container, yes, to minimize their contamination from earth organisms carried on the astronauts or the Lem and its fuel. But why put the whole command capsule in a cellophane bag after it has already "contaminated" the atmosphere, the Pacific Ocean, the helicopters, aircraft carrier? And the astronauts and their personal gear would further contaminate the air enroute to Houston, 10,666 miles away, and the cars that take them to the ~~airport~~ quarantine center from the airport!

imaginary
To waste any time, money or energy on such risks is ironic ~~after~~ in the light of the gigantic risks of the Apollo mission.

Sincerely yours,

Van Vechten Trumbull
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** Consider the energy that blasted out Tycho: the moon is covered with the scars of events that can be calculated to have scoured out secondaries.

J.L.

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